

FLEET HOSPITAL EIGHT

Pieces of Eight

Volume 1 Issue 7, June 6, 2003, Rota, Spain



A word from the CO...

I want to focus my comments for this newsletter on our redeployment. I know that our families are anxious for our return and don't understand why we do not know more about when we will return. I am going to address this head-on, because I know it is important to you.

When preparing for this deployment, we advised our staff to plan on being gone for six months. We didn't know whether six months was the right estimate, but felt the need to provide a planning estimate based on what we knew. As many of you are aware, ships and submarines are on a fairly predictable deployment schedule, and families have a good idea when they can expect their active duty spouses back. Fleet Hospitals do not deploy routinely, and there is no predictable schedule. Even ships during wartime, the most recent examples being USS Abraham Lincoln and USS Carl Vinson, do not follow their regular deployment schedules.

We knew we would be here until we were no longer needed to treat the sick and injured. Even though President Bush declared the main offensive over on May 1st, there are still many sick and injured service members coming from Iraq, Kuwait and Afghanistan. Right now, we have 95 inpatients in our 100- bed facility. Last week we medevaced-in more than 125 patients and medevaced-out more than 100 patients. The fact is that we are seeing as many patients now as we have since we've been here. That is why we are still here. There are still sick patients, and our mission remains to take care of them.

The leadership at Bremerton, San Diego and our other sourcing commands does not decide when we return. Fleet Hospital Eight personnel come from many different sourcing commands, but Fleet Hospital Eight belongs to European Command. They will decide when our mission is complete and when we'll return home. I talk with them frequently, and they are very aware of our situation.

Again, I know you are anxious. Because this is so important to us all, I've asked Father Trapani to address redeployment in his article as well. I'm told some of you think the leadership here and at your local MTF know when we're retuning and just aren't telling you. This is categorically untrue. I have told our staff here many times and will tell you the same – I will let you know what I know when I know it. Please be patient and thanks for your support of FH-8.

CAPT Kelly

The Padre's Message:
06 June 2003

Dear Shipmates, Families and Friends,

The most basic and frustrating learning that has taken place at the Fleet Hospital is that the war isn't over until it's over. I can pray all I want (and I do and you have), but reality grounds all prayer. We don't always get what we pray for, or at least everything we pray for. There is a lesson to be learned and that has to do with understanding the mission of a Fleet Hospital. When we left Bremerton it was to deploy to an undisclosed location for an undetermined length of time in support of "Operation Enduring Freedom" and subsequent worldwide military contingency operations as may be deemed necessary.

It's usually our desire to have precise answers to a precise plan of life that we are moving toward. But not even in the most precisely planned scheme of events is there absolute perfection. As the war in Iraq unfolded, the media (and people) wanted precise answers as to what, where, when, how, why and how long. They got none of it; at least not in the way they wanted it. As to what, we learned we were going to war against Saddam Hussein, where, Iraq, when, now, how, by the use of land, sea and air power; why, to end to terrorism in the world and uncover weapons of mass destruction, how long, until the mission is over. Most specifics were certainly not for public consumption for obvious reasons. The specifics always had to be, in a true sense, fluid. War, as a mission, is not clear-cut. There is planning, but plans have to, and do, change in a war environment. Just when you think your plan is perfect, the unexpected can, and often does happen.

That's exactly where we have been in our mission. We finally knew we were going to construct and staff a 116-bed Fleet Hospital at Naval Station Rota, Spain; we knew we would build it ourselves; we knew it was now, we knew we were tasked to treat patients from the war zone (Iraq). We got the place right, Rota, Spain, but not the fact that we would build a 116-bed hospital on one site and then a 250-bed hospital on another site. What and when and even how depended on the number and types of casualties, and we didn't know some would even be from Afghanistan. This is where we're at, we still don't know how long because the mission is still unfolding, we're still receiving the sick and injured (battle injuries from an ongoing war).

So, what should we pray for? Still pray for world-peace, but remember it won't come overnight; pray for an end to the fighting in Baghdad, but remember it won't come overnight; pray that we come home soon, but remember that it won't come overnight. Pray that we may all understand that ours is a medical within a military mission and that we are bound to care for the sick and wounded until our part is over. "Caring for...life."

Be blessed each day, and we'll see you when our mission is over.

— *Padre* - Father Trapani

On June 4, Fleet Hospital Eight received our 1,000th patient, a Marine corporal. With a current patient census of 95, the hospital staff is busy as ever with patient care and facility maintenance.



While we are getting fewer battle injuries and more walking wounded than we were just weeks ago, the severity of the injuries and illnesses has not diminished.



Many of our patients still need the full medical care available at the fleet hospital, and our staff continues to provide quality care to our wounded.



Even with the constant workload, we have also had a few visitors to the hospital. Representatives from the David Glasgow Farragut High School stopped by to let us know they appreciate our efforts in supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom.



We also had the pleasure of welcoming Harvey Keitel for a visit to the hospital. While he visited the patients, a few of us were also able to snag a picture with him.

